

# Income Poverty and Hunger in Asia: The Role of Information<sup>1</sup>

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Three decades of steady economic growth have contributed to a reduction in the mass poverty and frequent bouts of starvation that plagued much of post-war developing Asia-Pacific. Agriculture production played a key role in generating a pattern of rural development and growth that improved food availability and triggered virtuous cycles of poverty reduction. But poverty has evolved in ways that leaves many vulnerable to hunger, and our understanding of what it means to be hungry in Asia-Pacific has also advanced thanks to new knowledge. In Asia-Pacific, the poor, and the far larger numbers of those who are near-poor or vulnerable to poverty, suffer transitory bouts of under-nutrition that accumulate and have serious long-term consequences. Those in rural areas, and particularly those in the remote or disaster prone regions of South Asia, remain especially vulnerable to periodic bouts of severe hunger. Female headed households, and girls in general, may go hungry even in households with sufficient food supplies. Socially excluded groups may suffer from chronic poverty and hunger even in otherwise prosperous regions. Especially in South Asia, large numbers of households regularly have insufficient access to essential micro-nutrients, with devastating effects on productivity and human development. This evolving nexus of poverty and hunger in Asia-Pacific is less related to agriculture development than it was some three decades ago. Moreover, this new nexus of poverty-hunger issues is not well captured in food production reporting systems or in household surveys. Better information is needed to track progress in combating the evolving nexus of poverty and hunger issues that confront Asia-Pacific today.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared for the International Conference on Agriculture Statistics (ICAS III), Cancun, Q. R. Mexico, November 1-3, 2004.

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